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Summary record of the 68th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 19 May 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Darwish (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Egypt)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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In the absence of Ms. Wensley (Australia), Mr. Darwish (Egypt), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 121: Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (*continued*)

Letter dated 31 March 2000 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/54/819)

1. **The Chairman** drew the Committee's attention to a letter from the Secretary-General (A/54/819) concerning the financing of the International Civilian Support Mission in Haiti (MICAH).

2. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that the Committee would recall that the General Assembly had established the Mission by resolution 54/193 and had appropriated $9.2 million under the regular budget. The important technical assistance component aimed at capacity-building, estimated to require some $14.7 million, was to be funded from extrabudgetary resources. The Secretary-General had reported in his letter of 31 March 2000 (A/54/819) that no voluntary contributions for the MICAH Trust Fund had been received at that time, so that the Mission had been launched on 16 March 2000 with only core staff in the mission area. Since then, however, $11.5 million in voluntary contributions had been received and another $1.7 million was expected shortly, bringing the total to over $13 million. Since financing for the Mission had ceased to be a problem, he suggested that his office should keep the matter under review and report to the General Assembly, if necessary, at its fifty-fifth session.

3. **Mr. Ramos** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the European Union had from the start given its full support to the creation of the International Civilian Support Mission in Haiti (MICAH) as successor to the previous missions and had particularly welcomed the refocusing of the Mission around the three main pillars of justice, human rights and police.

4. At that time the European Union had reiterated the principle that special political missions should be financed mainly from the regular budget and had insisted that the pattern of financing for MICAH, for which more than half of the budget was to come from voluntary contributions, should not be taken as a precedent.

5. The report that no voluntary contributions had been received by 31 March 2000 was all the more disturbing in that essential tasks of the Mission in relation to justice, human rights and policing, were to be financed from extrabudgetary resources. Without them, the Mission could not fulfil its mandate.

6. The European Union was very pleased to learn that the bulk of the contributions had now been paid, but hoped that in future special political missions as essential to the stability of a country as MICAH would be adequately funded.

7. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that he wished to reiterate his delegation's strong commitment to MICAH and to providing extrabudgetary funding. The new Mission was the final step in the transition from peacekeeping and policing to institution-building. Although he regretted the delay in receipt of the pledged funds, he would like to point out that the United States had provided more funding in the form of voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund than any other country.

8. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that he had noted from the report of the Controller that the first instalment of $1.7 million from Canada had been duly received. A second instalment would shortly be forthcoming. He would like to know how many countries had pledged and how many had paid contributions to the MICAH Trust Fund.

9. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that the United States and Canada were the only contributors.

Agenda item 124: Pattern of conferences (*continued*) (A/C.5/54/62)

10. **The Chairman** drew attention to a letter dated 8 May 2000 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/54/62) regarding the possibility of holding the 2000 substantive session of the Committee on Conferences at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, as requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 23 of section B of its resolution 52/248.

11. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation supported the proposal contained in the letter and hoped that the Fifth Committee would quickly reach a decision on the matter, to which his delegation attached great importance. The United Nations Office at Nairobi was an important centre for developing countries.

12. **Ms. Bentley-Anderson** (United States of America) said that the proposal contained in the letter had to do not only with the United Nations Office at Nairobi but with the functioning of the Fifth Committee and the Committee on Conferences. It appeared that the Fifth Committee did not trust the Secretariat to develop a plan of action to increase utilization of the conference facilities at Nairobi, now that resources were available. It seemed to be abdicating its role as guardian of the budget by proposing actions without knowing the financial implications. Moreover, the work of the Committee on Conferences had always been and continued to be in New York.

13. Her delegation would appreciate clarification of what organizations were eligible to use United Nations conference facilities around the world. While fully supporting the concept of full utilization of the Nairobi facilities, her delegation wished to know whether any thought had been given to marketing the Nairobi facilities to other organizations or launching a campaign to sensitize Governments to their use. If Nairobi was to be the test case for all the underutilized centres, the challenge needed to be addressed with a well-thought-out plan for a responsible, predictable and documentable use of scarce resources. The Fifth Committee should not make hasty decisions without allowing the Secretariat to study the problem fully.

14. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda), speaking on behalf of the East African Community, said that the Community fully supported the statement made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and wished to thank the Secretariat and the Committee on Conferences for their far-sightedness in taking the General Assembly resolution seriously and finding ways to implement it. The Committee should encourage and support the proposal of the Committee on Conferences to hold its 2000 substantive session at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and should not go back over ground already covered in December.

15. **Mr. Ramos** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that in informal consultations the Union would like to have more specific information on the reasons for holding the session in Nairobi. The reasons given in paragraph 2 of the letter did not, in the Union's view, warrant the application of General Assembly resolution 1798 (XVII).

16. **Mr. Fukui** (Japan) said that his delegation shared the view that the Nairobi facilities should be more fully used and would appreciate recent data on their utilization by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Commission on Human Settlements.

17. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that his delegation had no objection to the holding of the 2000 substantive session of the Committee on Conferences at Nairobi. However, it was his understanding that the Committee on Conferences was a body of Member States and not of experts. If that was indeed the case, his delegation saw no reason why travel and subsistence expenses should be reimbursed.

18. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that her delegation reiterated its complete support for full use of all United Nations conference centres. She was pleased that the Committee on Conferences had given positive consideration to the request of the General Assembly and hoped that the Fifth Committee would also take a positive decision.

19. **Mr. Park Hae-yun** (Republic of Korea) said that his delegation was not against holding the 2000 session of the Committee on Conferences at Nairobi but would like to hear the reasons in greater detail and discuss the matter further in informal consultations.

20. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation was fully supportive of any initiative to increase the use of the Nairobi conference facilities. In its resolution the General Assembly had requested the Committee on Conferences to come up with a proposal. Now that it had done so, the Fifth Committee was obliged to give it positive consideration.

21. **Mr. Kandanga** (Namibia) said that his delegation aligned itself with the views expressed by Uganda and the Syrian Arab Republic. In supporting the holding of the 2000 substantive session of the Committee on Conferences in Nairobi, the Fifth Committee would not be taking a hasty decision, since the matter had been discussed extensively in December.

22. **Mr. Bouhadou** (Algeria) said that his delegation, as a member of the Committee on Conferences, strongly supported the proposal and would like, in informal consultations, to reopen the issue of travel costs.

23. **Mr. Elgammal** (Egypt), **Mr. Daka** (Zambia) and **Mr. Abdalla** (Sudan) said that their delegations were also in favour of a positive decision regarding the proposal to hold the 2000 session of the Committee on Conferences at the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

24. **Mr. Medina** (Morocco) said that his delegation was confident that all questions could be answered in informal consultations and hoped the Committee could arrive at a speedy decision.

25. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation wished to raise a number of issues concerning Conference Services. He had noted with great regret that implementation of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 54/248, section B, paragraph 11, was very limited. The Secretariat had provided only limited interpretation services to the preparatory conferences for Beijing+5 and the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

26. His delegation also wished to express its dissatisfaction with regard to the letter addressed to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic in Vienna by the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, in which it had intimated that the documents for the ninth session of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, to be held in Vienna from 5 to 16 June 2000, would be provided in the six official languages in electronic form, notwithstanding the assurances frequently given by the General Assembly to the effect that the use of new technology would have no effect on the traditional method of document distribution. His delegation wished to know when a discussion would be held on that matter, which was to be considered at the resumed session.

27. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services), responding to the questions raised by the Syrian representative, said that, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/248, section B, paragraph 11, interpretation services were provided to the extent that such services were available. That notwithstanding, the Secretariat had been making special efforts to provide services, despite a record high level of meetings activities in recent weeks. In one week alone, for example, Conference Services had managed to service 18 meetings of the Group of 77 and China. The Department was also servicing meetings on weekends. The Secretariat would do its utmost to ensure that as many requests as possible were met.

28. With respect to the second issue, he was not aware of the document the Syrian representative had mentioned, but would make the necessary enquiries of the appropriate departments in Vienna. It was his understanding that when documents were published electronically, hard copy versions were also made available.

Agenda item 118: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/54/427)

29. **The Chairman** proposed that the Fifth Committee should recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

> "*The General Assembly,*
>
> "*Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the Guidelines for Internal Control Standards, taking into account the Guidelines approved by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions, contained in document A/54/427".

30. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation would, in a spirit of flexibility, agree to the adoption of the draft decision, regardless of the fact that, once again, it had not been submitted to the Board of Auditors for consideration. He stressed that, in future, he would not agree to the adoption of any draft decisions which delegations had had less than 24 hours to consider. Furthermore, any amendment to the draft decision would need to be discussed in informal consultations. He hoped that there would be no further instances of informal consultations having to be held during meetings because amendments had been made to draft decisions without consulting delegations.

31. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that, while he had no problem with the draft decision, he wished to recall that the Advisory Committee had indicated that the Guidelines were too general to be operational. In that regard he wondered whether the Secretariat could explain the difference between incorporating the Guidelines and publicizing them, and what the impact of each option would be.

32. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, because of the views of the Advisory Committee and the Board of Auditors on the use of the

Guidelines, his delegation was unable to take note of the revised draft amendment; it could only take note of the report contained in A/54/427.

33. **Ms. Mahmud** (Department of Management) said that, following a recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Secretary-General had proposed that a formal reference to the Guidelines should be included in the Financial Regulations and Rules. The Advisory Committee had discussed the matter and consulted the Office of Legal Affairs and the Board of Auditors and decided that it was preferable not to amend the Financial Regulations and Rules of the Organization. The Secretariat had accepted the Advisory Committee's recommendation that there should be no formal adoption of the Guidelines, since the spirit of the Guidelines was already an integral part of operating procedures. Therefore, the OIOS recommendation had already been implemented, albeit informally.

34. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that, as previously indicated, his delegation believed that the standards promulgated by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) should be adopted and included in the Financial Regulations and Rules of the Organization. He had noted that the Board of Auditors and the Advisory Committee saw things differently and, therefore, had gone along with the approval of the draft decision. However, it was important to note that, in many instances, such as those mentioned in the report of the Board of Auditors on peacekeeping, the Organization had found itself in difficult positions because of abuse, fraud and mismanagement owing to weak internal controls. The Fifth Committee should not abdicate its responsibility to ensure that internal controls were as strong as they could be. His delegation wondered why the Committee had not accepted the collective wisdom of INTOSAI, since most of the member delegations of the Committee were also members of that body. His delegation expected the Secretary-General to comply as much as possible with the Guidelines for Internal Control Standards promulgated by INTOSAI.

35. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that the report of the Secretary-General clearly reaffirmed the views of the Advisory Committee and the Board of Auditors on the incorporation of the INTOSAI Guidelines. The best decision would be to take note of the report of the Secretary-General, without going into any further details concerning the Guidelines, which were clearly reflected in the report.

36. **Mr. Orr** (Canada), referring to paragraph 7 of the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/867, expressed the hope that, when the new Regulations and Rules were submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, the Secretary-General would ensure that they were consistent with the INTOSAI Guidelines. Moreover, pursuant to article X of the Financial Regulations and Rules, the Secretary-General was responsible for ensuring that the new Regulations and Rules were consistent with the Guidelines.

37. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the issue of the incorporation of the Guidelines had been before the Committee for two years. Pursuant to the General Assembly's request that it should be more extensively considered, the issue had been referred to the Board of Auditors, which, like the Advisory Committee, was not in favour of incorporation. The same conclusion had been reached by the Fifth Committee. The Secretary-General could issue the Guidelines for the Secretariat to use without them being binding. He therefore proposed that note should be taken of the report: any further action might give rise to differences that would need to be settled in informal consultations.

Other matters

38. **Mr. Medina** (Morocco) referred to the information circular on the 2000 competitive examination for Arabic Language Coordinator (ST/IC/2000/33). In addition to Arabic as a main language, it was indicated in paragraph 5 (g) that a working knowledge of English was required, and that knowledge of other official languages was desirable. Such requirements would exclude Arabic-speaking candidates without a sound grasp of English and he wondered how that issue could be addressed. The previous year, a competitive examination had been cancelled because of similar concerns.

39. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that, to the best of his knowledge, the post of Arabic Language Coordinator fell within the purview of the Office of Human Resources Management.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.